



## THE SETS PROJECTS

The Sets projects started in the early 1970s with an element in the programme for the Monte Carlo Casino, a very theatrical outdoor space for events like the annual Red Cross gala ball. Our idea was to make an architecture which serviced the space and covered it in the event of rain, but at the same time was continually transformed by movie-sets. So the space could be Elizabethan, or Modern, or Art Deco, or whatever suited the event, as was illustrated in a series of collages at the time.

The notion of the Suburban Sets came from talking to my son Andrew, who was then at school and writing a paper about the architecture of Suburbia. We invented a suburb based on Woodford, where we live. The architecture was paper-thin scenery reflecting the public face which people chose to present to others. The facade windows served as Sets: the design and decoration would change according to what the occupants wanted the outside world to believe about their life-styles. Most importantly, there was behind the Sets a private world, a place where people could make their own environments. We chose three families to illustrate the idea: an architect who could use the notion intelligently, a camping enthusiast who had a trailer home



behind his facade (a really high-living camper), and a former bomber pilot whose private Set was the fuselage of an old B-24 Liberator. The idea was that they could choose the environment that they wanted to live in - they could be in Hawaii, or India, or on a bombing mission. From my observation, this is exactly what happens in the suburb: people build their own myth and reality into their houses.

The 'Sets Fit for the Queen' of 1975 started off as an entry to the Shinkanchiku competition to design 'A House for a Superstar'. I chose the Queen and the Royal Family as Britain's ultimate superstars and designed a palace which had as its antecedents the studios of Paramount and the great Hollywood production companies, as well as the stage-set facades of the Regent's Park terraces and Disneyland's Main Street, USA. The premise was that the Royal Family lived in an essentially theatrical condition, moving from one set to another depending on what role they were expected to play at the time. For state occasions they could call up any kind of setting, be it coffee bar modern or Baroque or medieval or Art Deco. They had at their fingertips a catalogue from which they could choose or invent the new settings, including private settings where they could live out their own dreams at will. A workforce of people would build and change the

Sets. The building would twitch and shiver into life, becoming what the family wanted - the ultimate dream palace.

The most recent Sets project was a house for Gary Withers of Imagination. We started off by talking about the house that we'd seen in one of the Beatles movies, where they all go through different doors in a terrace and end up in a single space, a huge shed. The proposition was to buy a series of terrace houses in London, so you could enter through a number of front doors... and find yourself in a shell. The whole space would be contained by the frontage with an adaptable frame behind it to carry variable floors and an adjustable roof. Gary's house would become sets that he could change at will. A space that was a vestibule and dining room one day could be a totally different vestibule and library or living room the next. It could be dressed up in a Baroque or a Modernist manner, just as Gary wished. In other words, the Sets would be Fit for Gary.



## Upcoming Exhibitions

**Acoustic Meyer**  
curated by the  
May 6 - June 18, 1998

Storefront will showcase the work of Dutch fashion designer Acoustic Meyer. Mr. Meyer emphasizes cultural and social relations by utilizing remnant paper packaging from various countries to produce a series of garments. The packaging originates from four chosen countries: Denmark, Japan, India, and the US. Highly visual and tactile, the clothes will be arranged by country while the number of garments in each represented geographical section expresses that country's attitude towards the consumption of disposable packaging.

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Editorial Assistant: Peter Lang  
Eco-Tec International Forums: Amerigo Marras

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from January 1997  
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I would like to make a contribution of \$

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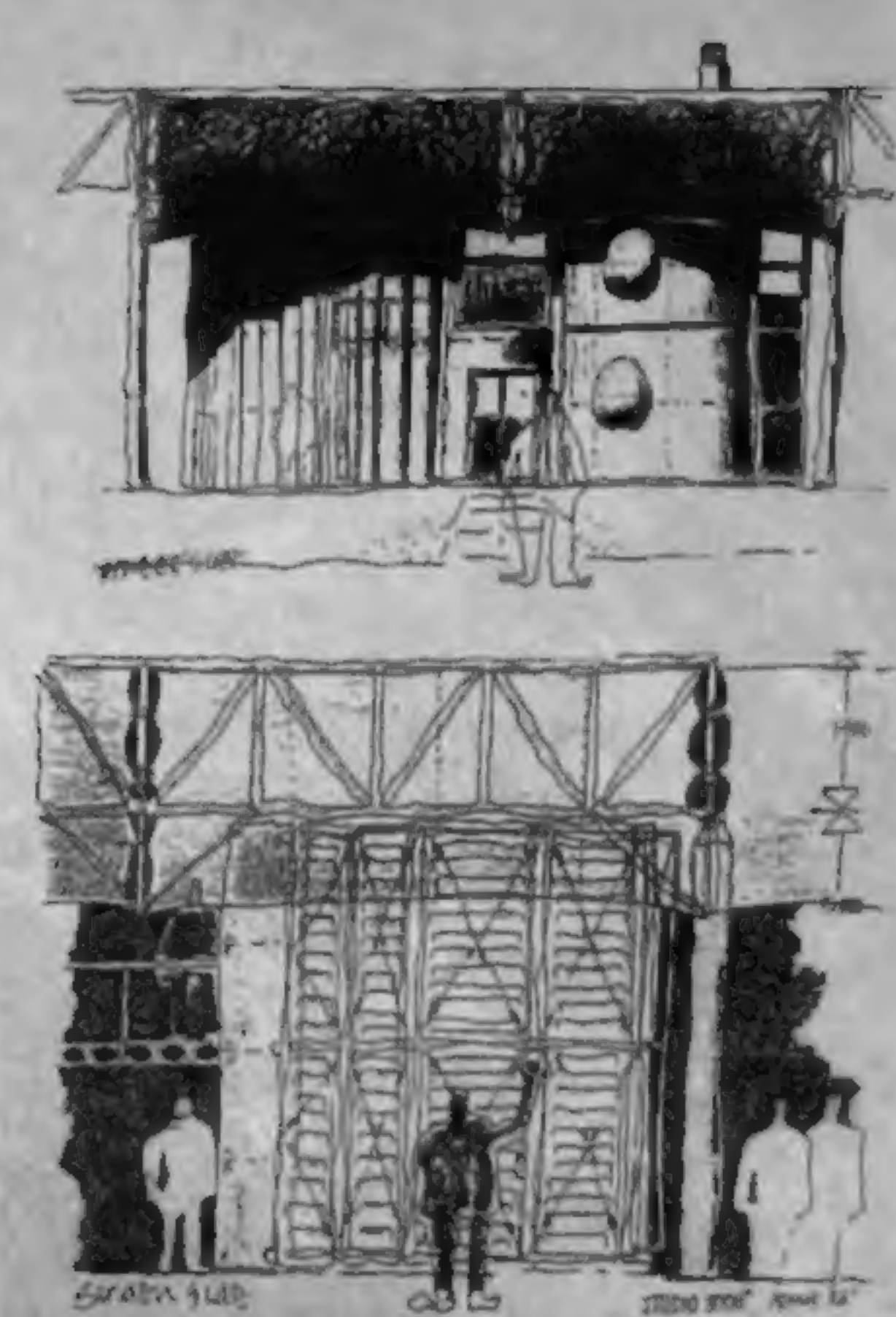
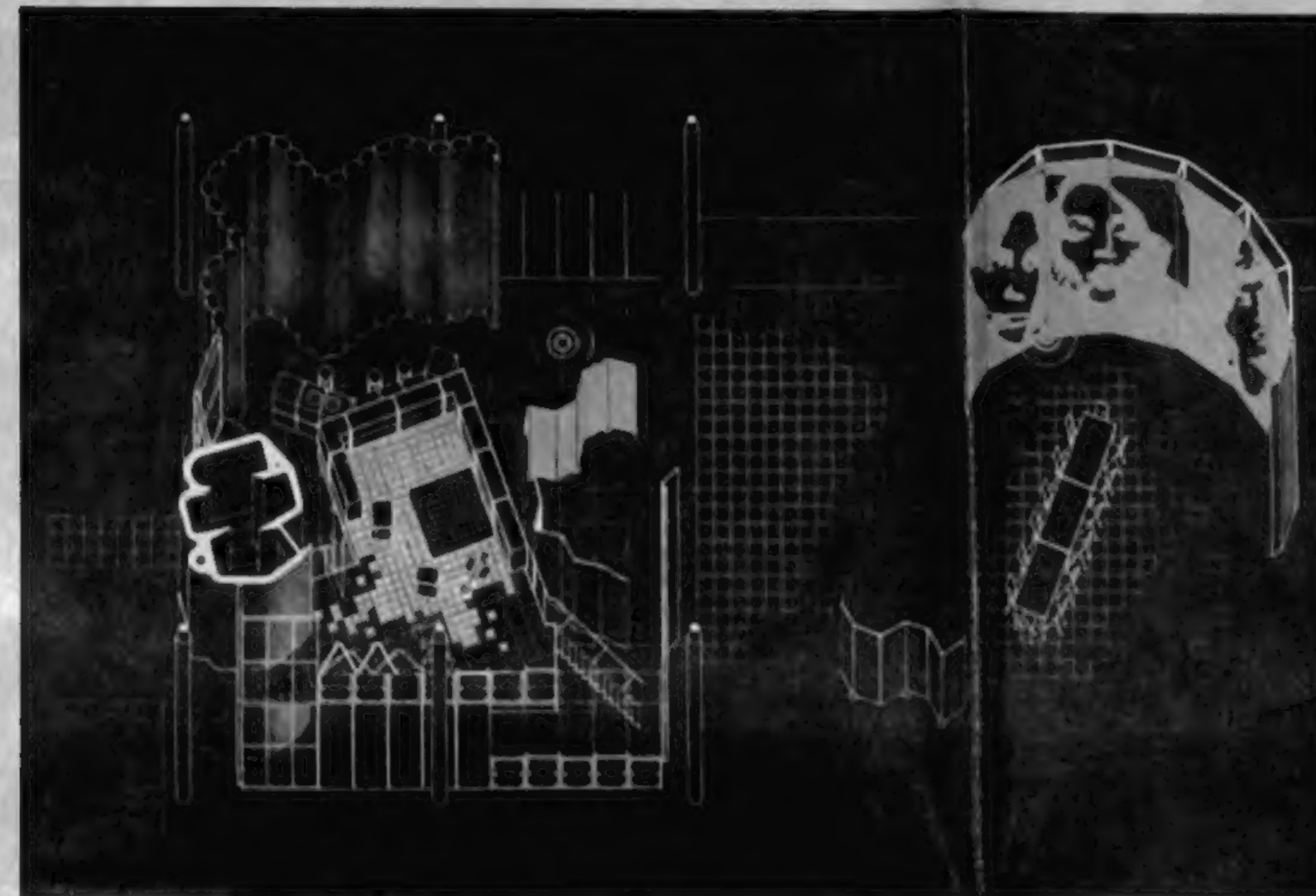
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March 14 - April 25 1998

Public Reception: March 14, 1998 5-8pm  
Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10:30am-6pm

## Studio Strips and The Sets Projects

# Ron Herron



## Archigram Experimental Architecture, 1961-74

Warren Chalk Peter Cook Dennis Crompton David Greene Ron Herron Michael Webb

Storefront for Art & Architecture, in conjunction with Thread Waxing Space, Pratt Institute, Columbia and Cornell Universities presents the first ever major American exhibition on Archigram, the visionary English architectural collaborative. Storefront will present selected works of Ron Herron. Archigram: Experimental Architecture, 1961-74 includes over 400 drawings, models, multi-media installations, magazines and recreated environments, and will be presented in the following spaces

## Other Locations

**Thread Waxing Space**  
478 Broadway, Second Floor, New York, NY 10013  
March 12-April 25, 1998 Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm  
Public Reception: March 14, 1998 3-8pm

**Columbia University: Arthur Ross Architectural Gallery, Buell Hall**  
Broadway and 116th Street, New York, NY 10027  
March 12-April 13, 1998 Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 12-6pm

**Cornell University: Martell Gallery**  
Sibley Hall, Ithaca, New York  
March 23-April 3, 1998 Gallery Hours: Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm

## PAVILION DISCUSSION

Saturday, March 14, 1998 3-5pm  
**Thread Waxing Space**  
478 Broadway, Second Floor, New York, NY 10013  
with Andrea Codrington, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, Mildred Friedman, David Greene, William Menking, Graham Shane, Michael Webb

## PUBLICATION

"Concerning Archigram," 168-page catalogue, designed and edited by Dennis Crompton is available. It includes essays by Barry Curtis and William Menking, an introduction by Michael Sorkin and a prologue by David Greene, along with writings and projects by the members of Archigram.

This exhibition has been made possible by support from The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, The British Council, Ove Arup & Partners, USA, Polzhek & Partners Architects, Lee/Timchula Architects, Francois de Menil Architect PC, Theo. David & Associates, Richard Gluckman Architects, Guinness Import Co. (Bass Ale), Cluquot, Inc. and public funds from The New York State Council on the Arts.

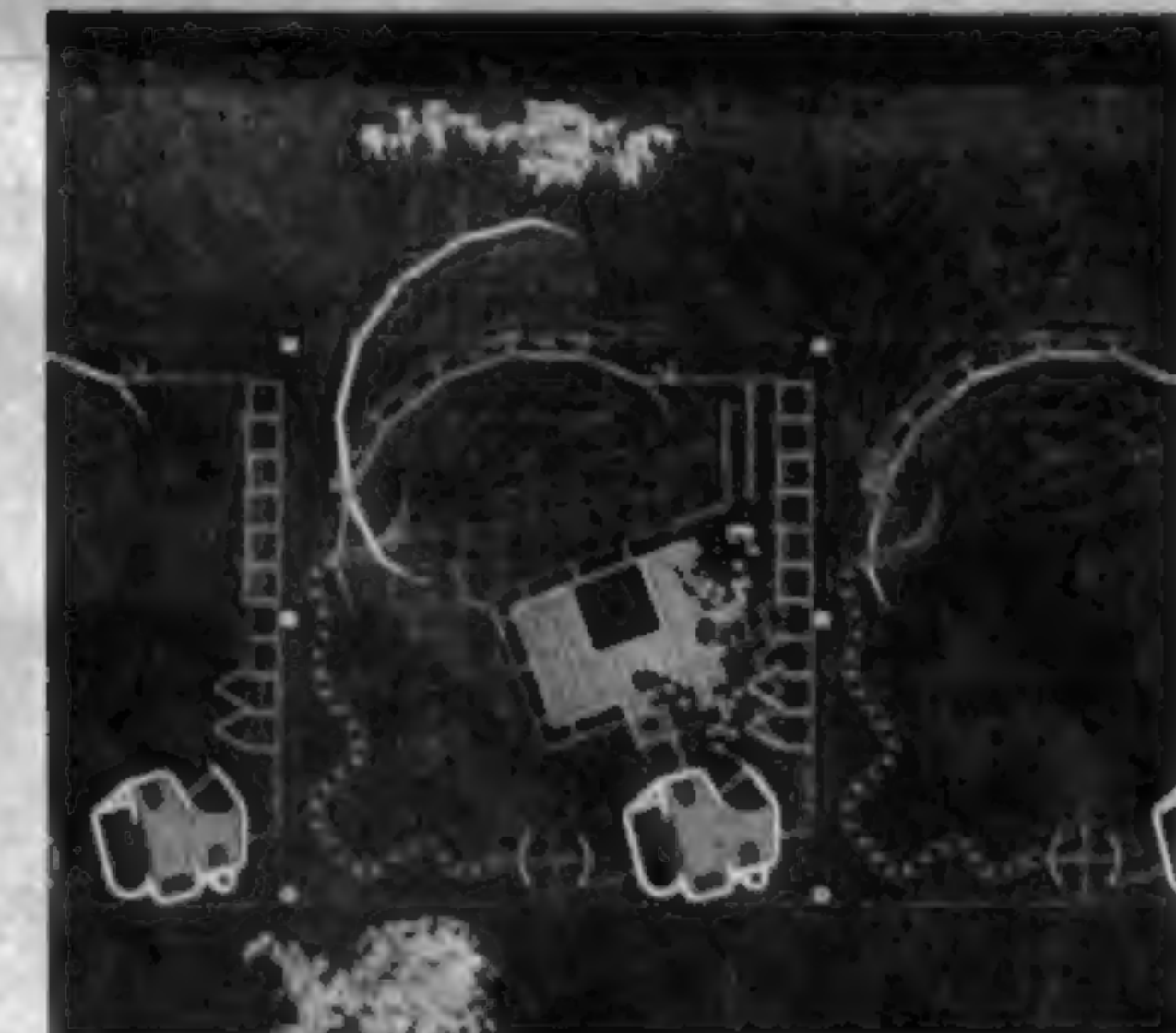
## STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE  
67 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10012 U.S.A.

14 March-25 April

opening reception: March 14, 1998

RON HERRON  
Archigram



Storefront for Art and Architecture is supported by The Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation, Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Visual Arts, Greenwall Foundation, Jerome Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, The New York City Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Friends.

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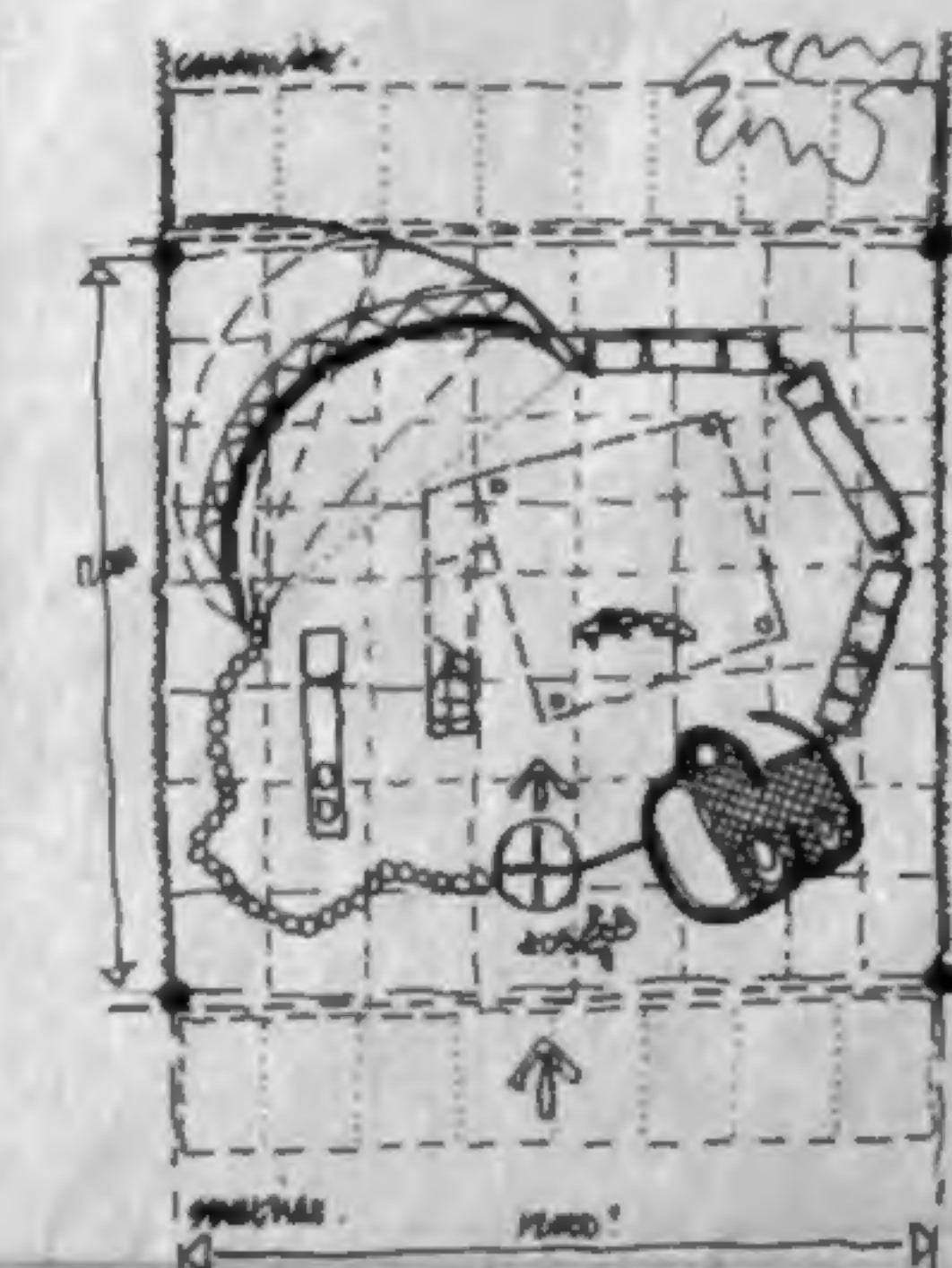
During the 1960s and early '70s, Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron and Michael Webb, came together to produce *Archigram* (from *An Architectural telegram*), which challenged mainstream publications and ideas with radical alternatives to cities, houses and architectural authority. They drew inspiration from a variety of contemporary sources, including space travel, science fiction, the Beatles and underground culture, for their *Walking Cities*, *Plug-in environments* and *Capsule structures*. These projects had repercussions on subsequent avant-garde architecture and art in Europe, the United States and Japan.

## CONCERNING ARCHIGRAM

SOMEBODY ONCE SAID TO ME, "DIDN'T YOU WANT TO SEE IT BUILT, DON'T YOU WANT TO BE AN ARCHITECT?" TO MY MIND, THE ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THESE QUESTIONS LIES A MISUNDERSTANDING AS TO WHAT THE WORK OF ARCHIGRAM REPRESENTS. A MISREADING OF IT AS A SET OF PROPOSALS, A SET OF WINDOWS THROUGH WHICH TO SEE A 'NEW WORLD', IS ONLY A RATHER PATHETIC REGURGITATION OF THE DOGMA WHICH ASSERTS THAT ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS ARE REPRESENTATIONS OF SOMETHING THAT WISHES TO BECOME. ARCHIGRAM'S EFFORTS LAY NOT IN THIS TRADITION; THEY WERE NOT RESTYLED MODERNISM, THEY REPRESENTED A CONCEPTUAL SHIFT, IN COMMON WITH OTHER CREATIVE ENTERPRISES, AWAY FROM AN INTEREST IN THE COMMODITY (IN THIS CASE, SAY, THE BUILDING OR THE CITY) TOWARDS AN INTEREST IN THE PROTOCOLS, STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES OF MID TWENTIETH-CENTURY CULTURE. ONE MIGHT THEN ASK: "WHY DRAW IT SO EXHAUSTIVELY?"—AND IN A SENSE, PERHAPS, THE WEIGHT OF THE DRAWING DOES "DTRACT" FROM THE CONTENT OF THE WORK.

ALTHOUGH ARCHIGRAM EMBRACED THIS FACT WITH PERHAPS AN ALARMING LACK OF CRITIQUE, IT WAS ALSO WITH A BOUNDLESS INNOCENT ENTHUSIASM. BEHIND ALL THE WORK LIES A PERISTENT OPTIMISM IN TECHNOLOGY, PURE FAITH IN THE FUTURE, AND A SCORN POURED UPON THE ITERATION OF MODERNIST DOGMA—OR RATHER, THE REFUSAL OF POST-WAR PRACTICE TO INVEST THE MODERNIST PROJECT WITH NEW EMERGING REALITIES. THIS IS A NEW TERRAIN IN WHICH INFORMATION BECOMES ALMOST A SUBSTANCE, A NEW MATERIAL WITH THE POWER TO RESHAPE SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS, IN WHICH THE CITY BECOMES A CONTINUOUS BUILDING SITE IN VERY LITERAL SENSE, IN WHICH THINGS AND PEOPLE VIBRATE AND OSCILLATE AROUND THE GLOBE IN AN ECSTATIC CONSUMPTION OF ENERGY, IN WHICH THE MODERNIST SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC IS AN ANACHRONISM, IN WHICH RESTLESSNESS IS THE CURRENT CULTURAL CONDITION. THIS IS THE LANDSCAPE INHABITED BY ARCHIGRAM.

—DAVID GREENE  
EXCERPT FROM "CONCERNING ARCHIGRAM," EDITED BY DENNIS CROMPTON, ARCHIGRAM ARCHIVES, 1998



## RON HERRON

A Londoner, who, at age of 15 went to the Bruton School of Building to learn carpentry, but discovered architecture.

• First job, in a one-man architectural practice, was as assistant/typist/telephonist/tea maker • Studied architecture at evening school, firstly at Briston and later at the Polytechnic, Regent Street • In 1952 married Pat, his girlfriend from the age of sixteen • Son, Andrew, born in 1958 • After completing National Service (Ron is a 'veteran' of the Berlin airlift) joined London County Council Architects' Department in 1954 and met Warren Chalk and Dennis Crompton, and through a mutual friend, Peter Cook, David Greene and Mike Webb • In 1962 they together joined the Euston Project team with Robin Middleton, Brian Richards, Frank Linden and Alex Pike under Theo Crosby • The Archigram Group was born in this period and combined to produce Archigram magazine • Son, Simon, born in 1963 • Commenced teaching at the Architectural Association in 1966 and has done so, apart from a two-year gap, to the present (this needs to be updated) • Joined Warren Chalk in 1968 as Visiting Professor at University College of Los Angeles • Like Reynier Banham, fell in love with Los Angeles • Lived there for two years, and has managed a visit each year since • Returned in 1970 to form the Archigram office, with Peter Cook and Denis Crompton, on winning the Monte Carlo competition; after three years the project was shelved • After Archigram, joined Pentagram and became a partner from 1977-81 • Formed Herron Associates in 1982, joined by his sons, Andrew (1985) and Simon (1988) • Merged with Imagination Ltd, after completion of their Headquarters on Store Street, London, as Herron Associates at Imagination (bring up to date)

• A Leo, an optimist, enjoys the company of his friends, quiet, an Arsenal fan, enjoys drawing to illustrate his ideas rather than writing about them, and believes that 'any sufficiently advanced technology is magic'—

• Ron Herron passed away in 1994

## Outlines of Real Illusions

At first sight, the world of Ron Herron's drawings looks suspiciously like a theme park: cardboard public facilities, hovering mysterious cars, filled with scurrying and unregulated machinery clearly intended for the enjoyment of visitors. Yet these are not mere toys to be enjoyed; the mysterious machinery behind the facade is no less important or consequential than the exterior events by their public elections. Conventional outward show and radical interior fantasy are here created equal—and the ghostly challenge you may hear in the historical background could, just, be kept down, who long ago laid down the ground-rules for the Great British Architectural Illusion. (Fortunately every man carries a Gropius in Public Places, yet cowardly both his insignificance and on fire and sometimes heroically flying out, as nature itself death when first it is strangled.)

But then again, the Herron world can also look more like a sprawling machine or music-centers sitting unattended, snug and self-contained, in Anatolian glades, offering to transform a waste place into a Garden of unmistakably Earthly Delights. Or it can offer what appears to be a space-vehicle, as Nature's virgins, dangling complex arrays of audiovisual equipment mockingly above desert cities and Victorian suburbs, leaving what stands upon the ground transformed in meaning and use, yet unchanged in physical fabric, just as it can threaten to invade the volumes of existing structures and leave them utterly transparent, without disturbing a single brick or structural joint.

And first impressions do not utterly deceive, what is projected here is a very strange world indeed, where reality requires hardware to re-quip your given built world—a world made more disturbing by being only about a half frame ahead of the current reality which will come up on the screen, with no assistance from architects, after the next batch of commercials. Ron Herron has already been around long enough to see the allegedly impractical projects in his early sketches come true in the hands of other architects, and occasionally his own. However visionary his drawings remain, persuasive in so-called practical terms, and the highly finished ones in particular contain (or appear to contain) possible components and details and clip-on equipment for making it all happen, for making illusion reality real. The drawn hardware may be no more than allegorical, as it were, of real-world and real-time stuff, but it is rarely a long jump from the allegory to the actual hardware that will soon be on-line to do the job.

If one looks at his sketches, however, rather than the black-busting presentation drawings, one can see that there may be a very good reason why there should be the sense of being less than a frame away from reality, at the level of his first-approximation sketches. The proposed structures and installations rarely seem to imply anything more than conventional current technologies of equipment and construction, blended together with off-the-shelf contemporary—though not always from the world of regular architecture. And that has should come as no great surprise, since Herron's whole notion is to merge the world of regular architecture.

Perceptive though these can be, no nonsense about her not being an architect. He is not a structural nor a systems engineer, in spite of his knowledge of both areas. He is not a computer whiz, nor even a hacker, though few living architects are quite so computer friendly. He is, however, and in his generation, entirely at home in the world of current technology, yet always and utterly an architect. He knows exactly what he is after when he goes round invading the professional turf of adjacent specializations (or even remote ones), but when he returns from these forays of design piracy he does not appear bent over the hardware down, as were the Machine Architects of the 1920s, with the weight and importance of the task he has acquired. He still occupies his usual professional posture.

He never ceases to think and design like an architect, so that if his projects appear strange, they are no more than strange, rather than alien or threatening, to other architects, and the excitement that he derives from these forays is communicable to other architects by purely architectural means—or drawings, as they are more usually called.

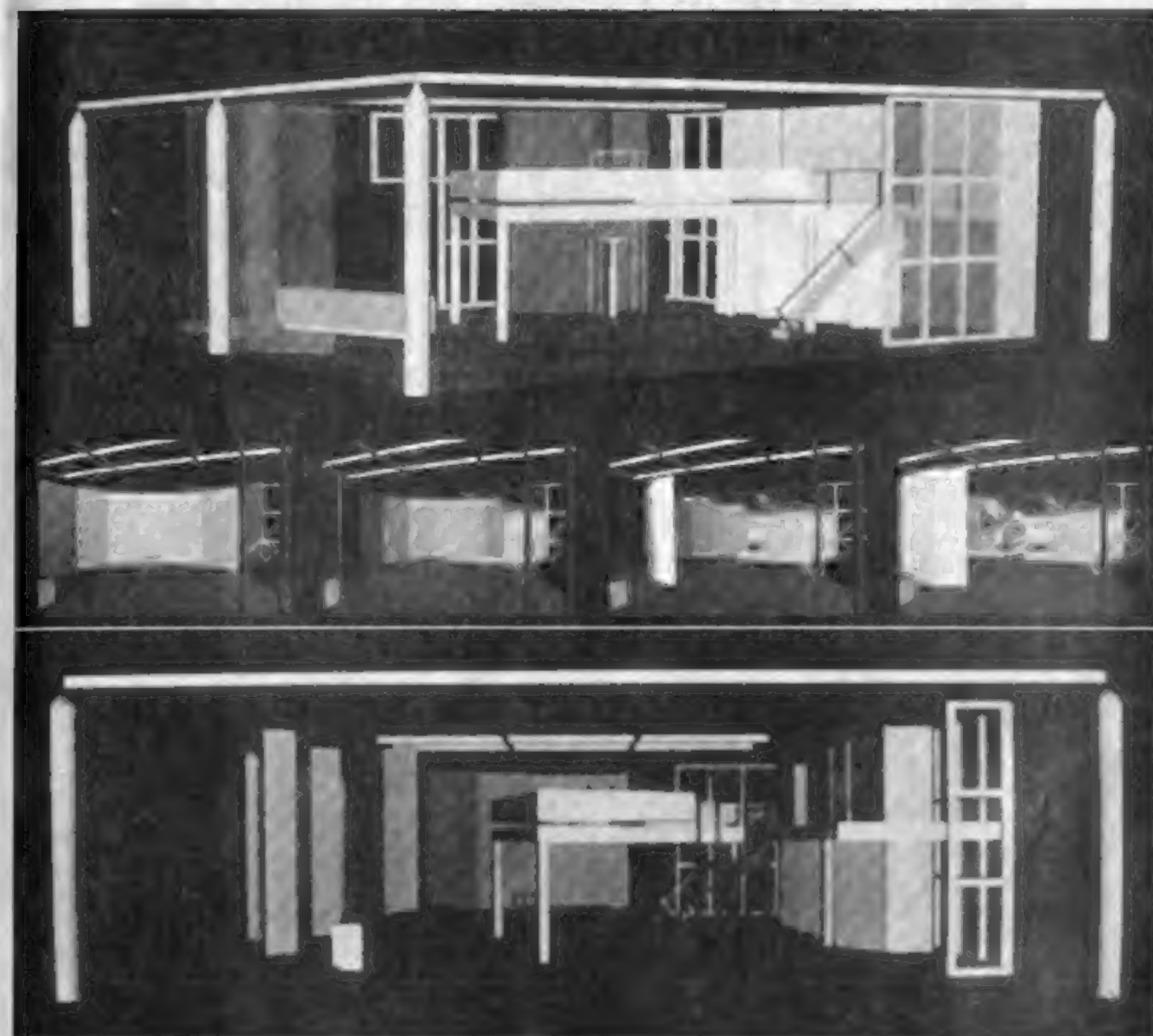
The pleasures of the show, the swagger of the returning explorer, are there even in the finished renderings, but you catch them raw and unadorned in the sketches in which Ron Herron accumulates and refines his architectural thoughts, or occasionally records useful gaudies that come his way. The processes by which forms and ideas are borrowed from other fields are revealed there, but what is striking is that the means of acquisition themselves, the techniques of capture and dissemination for architectural purposes, are entirely conventional, not in any traditional—yet futuristic—Mannerist, Manierist, or in that kind of familiar stuff. Only a little material is collected in its final, historic, method of architectural recording—designs, design, drawing, rendering, drawing—is employed, and even his electronic outputs are computer graphics, right?

## ROBOTS

Robots have cropped up in my work for many years. I am fascinated by the idea of the mechanical being, the servant-like object. *Metropolis* was one of the early versions of this. A tiny sort of puppy dog that would follow you around and be your companion. Like a motor car, it came with many optional extras, such as voice command, or the ability to open up and make an enclosed personal space, or turn into an audio-visual unit. It was a friendly little object that respected Auer's first laws of robotics.

Then there were the larger robots. The one made for imagination was a sort of carrying device brought out for events in the central space in *Dark Street*. It was very theatrical, and on occasion it would be dressed up as Father Christmas or something like that. The idea of the little servant and the big servant, not necessarily as human forms but rather as friendly humanoid objects, continued through new or later other projects. The *Robohouse*, for instance, had redefined rooms, screens, walls. The idea of elements of a building being controlled by voice command is close to realization with the current move towards voice-activated computers and the like. One can just dream of these redefined elements moving down and gracefully through space on command, making a truly responsive environment.

The point is important, what Ron Herron's effort in architecture still, not finished design (even when he designs a product) for pink-dynasty (even when he buys out pink). The trained eye that can recognize the presence of architecture will also recognize the trained hand that cannot help making architecture. Now that plastic building architecture is, in the sense employed here, almost the copyright of Karel Ploos, an architect to whom Ron Herron is in some ways very close, though neither of them may have noticed it yet. The difference between them—which is crucial—is that Ploos's severe is mostly built, whereas Ron Herron's vision is still largely on paper. The severity—which is even more crucial—is that both were equally obsessed with making sense, straightforward architectural sense, of the consumption of materials and methods that has been spilled across architects' drafting boards by modern technology (as we would call it in the innocent beginnings of High Tech).



## Studio Strip

Following the *Robohouse* I made a project called *Studio Strip*, continuing a fascination with the idea of the robotised building which began, I suppose with an early Archigram project, *Control and Choice*, and with the *Houses for the Year 1990* exhibition at Harrods. The idea was to make a strip or terrace of studio dwellings which consisted purely of a roof on a frame. The oddball thing was that the parts that made up the house—the walls, upper floor and screen elements—were entirely robotised so they could be driven into other positions to respond to the user. The screen on the garden side, for example, was a divisible curved video wall, some 15 metres long and 6 metres high, which could be hinged to open outwards. You could therefore see the real garden, or play a video on the wall of any environment that you wished to be in, or even drive the wall right out into the garden, taking the idea of indoor/outdoor architecture to an extreme. This design was also of interest because it allowed us to experiment with one of our early computer models, after we managed to convince an animation studio to animate it for us. With Dennis Crompton, who did some trickery with the backcloths, we made a video that was eventually shown at the German Architecture Museum in the 1996 exhibition, *Vision der Moderne*. The video starts with an animated walk into the *Studio Strip*. Then you see me sitting in the computer model with moving images on the video wall behind me—I'm in a real space talking about real images. In the end sequence the screen opens, and I'm sitting in my own garden finishing the conversation. This animation sequence was an early attempt of ours to simulate a real environment, and I still find it quite fascinating.

